WHAT IS THE DIAPER GAP?

DID YOU KNOW...
• 22% of children under 5 years old in the U.S. live in poverty.

• 1 out of every 3 families struggles to afford diapers. They also struggle to buy food, detergent, soap and other household goods. They have to make hard choices when money is in short supply.

• Food Stamps (SNAP) and WIC benefits cannot be used to purchase diapers

• Infants require up to 12 diapers per day, toddlers about 8 and the need continues into the preschool years.

• Diapers cost an average of $100 monthly; up to 6% of gross pay for a low income family. A child will wear an average of 50 diapers a week – or approximately 2,600 a year for each child.

• Without transportation, buying diapers at a convenience store rather than a large discount store can double or triple the monthly cost.

• Most childcare providers require that a parent supply an adequate supply of disposable diapers to enroll a child.

• For sanitary reasons, coin-operated laundromats often don’t allow customers to wash cloth diapers, and many families may not have their own washer and dryer.

NOT HAVING ENOUGH DIAPERS MEANS...
• A longer time between changes, increasing the risk of severe diaper rash and infection.

• Babies may cry longer when they are in a soiled diaper or because of an infection, increasing stress for parents, and negatively impacting the parent-child relationship.

• Parents’ sense of self-worth and mental health may be adversely affected; they may feel they are not being good providers and able to parent the way they would like to.

• Parents may not be able to leave their baby at day care and return to work or school because they cannot supply enough diapers.

HELP CLOSE THE DIAPER GAP! Contact Judith Weinthaler, Diaper Task Force Coordinator; jweinthaler@gmail.com/ 413-548-5469
WHY DIAPERS MATTER

An adequate supply of diapers for low income families has huge ramifications for child health and development including social/emotional development, parent-child relationships, a child’s school success, and the economic and educational opportunities for the parents. This all begins at birth and involves something as basic as diapers. The diapering “routine” is a big part of parent-child interaction. Infants use 12 or more diapers a day. This interaction can enhance a child’s development or, if there is a shortage of diapers, it can increase stress in both parent and child and have a negative impact on this relationship and future growth of both child and parent.

Diapers are expensive: $100 per month or more! In low income families there is likely a food need as well so meeting baby’s basic needs gets expensive. (WIC and SNAP/food stamps do not cover diapers.) Diapers can be even more expensive if there is a transportation need and the family has to buy diapers at a convenience store in small packs. Large quantities are difficult to transport. This impacts working families. If parents are working in low paying jobs, the cost of diapers may eat up as much as 6% of gross pay.

Two Scenarios

Diaper Need Met

Parent:

Baby cries and Mom or Dad attends and tunes into the baby’s physical and emotional needs; they respond and pick up the baby and check the diaper; comfort and calm the child by talking soothingly and using expressive facial expressions; . They then change the diaper while talking to the baby; play naming games; maintain eye contact and smile. It is a positive interaction. While Mom or Dad may be exhausted and busy taking care of the family, they are able to focus on the baby and not worry about having diapers. They can feel good about themselves, their parenting and their ability to provide for their child.
Baby:
The baby’s needs are met; stress is reduced. “When I cry because I am wet or messy, Mom or Dad respond and I feel better; I feel positively attached to them. I am also learning things by listening to them talk, including how to regulate my emotions and how to communicate my needs. Getting my diapers changed can even be fun!”

Diaper Need Not Met:

Parent:
Baby cries and Mom or Dad want to comfort and care for their child and keep the baby healthy but they are frustrated because they are short of diapers and there isn’t any money to buy more until the end of the month. They may have to cope by cutting back on food or not buying medicine thus endangering their child’s health. They may hear or see the child crying, fussing or whining but be so stressed that they are not really able to focus on tuning into and meeting the child’s needs.

They may respond, “Oh no, I just changed you! You pee too much! You’ll just have to wait for a dry diaper!” Or “Oh no, another messy diaper. I’ll just have to clean this out and reuse it for now. Then you’ll probably get another infection or rash and that means more doctor bills!” The thought may be, “This is so distressing and I am trying so hard not to get angry with you; sometimes I just want to…….” “I am a terrible parent. I feel so depressed and like giving up.”

The parent is certainly not in the mental state to smile, be empathetic, play games, provide language input, and generally calm the baby. Mom or Dad don’t feel very good about themselves as providers. Their own mental health and ability to cope is impacted.

Baby:
The baby’s needs are not fully met. “I’m confused. I cry and even act out and tantrum and no one seems to understand what I need. I’m wet and my bottom is sore (that rash or infection again!) and that makes me fussy and cry more. I am stressed! Mom/Dad doesn’t talk to me in a quiet way to calm me down. Maybe I need to cry louder and make a bigger fuss more often so they understand and pay attention. This is not fun when they don’t smile or look at me; we don’t’ play those games about my nose or toes.” “Maybe crying doesn’t do any good and I’ll just give up and not even try to get their attention.”

We know positive parent-child interactions from infancy can foster healthy emotional and social development and affect brain development. A baby’s brain pathways for emotional reactions are “wired”
as a result of experiences to respond in a regulated way OR in more of a “fight-flight-flee” reaction. A parent’s responses to a child’s stress influence this “wiring process”. With positive interactions, healthy attachment is established. Communication, language and cognitive development are fostered. OR the outcome may not be as positive if the parent is highly stressed. And a lot of interaction time happens around basic needs – including diapering! (as well as food and dressing). Not having a sufficient quantity of diapers can result in increased stress and possibly mental health issues for both parent and child. The child is also at risk for health problems when diapers aren’t changed when needed.

**Opportunity Gap for Parent and Child**

Child care programs typically require that a parent supply disposable diapers. If the parent cannot afford all the diapers needed, then they may not be able to enroll the child in an early education and care program. Early education increases school success. A child who attends an early education program is 2.5 times more likely to go on to higher education.

If childcare is not available for the parent, she or he is not able to return to or obtain a stable job and potentially increase their income. They are not able to continue their education or obtain training to get a job in the future. Lost opportunity for both parent and child.

Use of cloth diapers is an option our Diaper Drive Project would like to explore so we could offer a choice to families. However, disposable diapers are still needed for childcare programs. Cloth diapers are also expensive and many families don’t have easy access to washing machines. Laundromats cost money and some don’t allow the washing of cloth diapers.

A study done by Yale University (2013) found that 30% of low income mothers report they cannot afford an adequate supply of diapers. As many as 1 in 5 women experience emotional complications following birth. A struggle to afford diapers adds to the emotional stress. Help with diapers was shown to reduce these emotional problems.

A study commissioned by Feeding America (2013) found that 34% of low income families reported they were commonly unable to purchase basic household goods such as diapers, laundry detergent, soap and toothpaste. 82% of these families also reported food insecurity. To cope, these families reported cutting back on food and medical expenses to pay for these basic household goods or skipping doing laundry or even washing dishes. 32% reported reusing diapers and 48% delayed changing diapers.

All these coping strategies endanger a child’s physical health as well as their emotional development. Supplying diapers can reduce parental and family stress, as well as health and mental health complications. Research has shown that maternal and family mental health problems can have long term and debilitating effects on children’s well-being and their success in school.
Closing the Diaper Gap significantly helps the parent caring for the child feel better about themselves and their ability to take care of their child and gives them opportunities to develop into strong and successful children and adults. Getting help with diapers in financial hard times, reduces family stress and leads to more positive interactions between parents and children. Sufficient diapers also reduces health risks, and expands opportunity for both parents and children through education and work.

Please help our families in Franklin County by supporting the Diaper Drive.

*Changing Diapers Changes Lives!*

For information about donations and how you can help by doing a diaper fund raiser at your workplace, with groups you belong to, and with friends, please contact:

Judith Weinthaler, Diaper Task Force Coordinator

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Information is also available on our Website: communityaction.us and click on “community partnerships”
**WHY DIAPERS MATTER**

**Fosters a positive parent-child relationship:**
- Attachment and bonding
- Tuning into child’s physical and emotional needs
- Impacts child’s development

**Reduces parents' stress levels**
- Enhances positive sense of self and mental health
- Supports feeling like a good parent and provider
- Strengthens family stability
- Reduces health care costs

**Reduces child’s stress levels**
- Increases child’s ability to regulate emotions
- Affects child’s language, cognitive, social, and emotional development

**Reduces child’s health/mental health risks**
- Reduces rashes, infections, and medical costs
- Reduces need to cut back on food to buy diapers
- Improved child nutrition

**Diapers needed for child to attend early education and care programs**
A child is 2.5x more likely to go on to higher education if they attend an early education program.

**Allows parents to work or attend school; Increases income potential.**